



ONTOLOGICA

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ONTOLOGICA

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Non-fiction Editor and Layout

Rod Dixon

Fiction Editor, Web Development, Layout

Drew Lackovic

Art Editor

Susane Andracki

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WPG Logo: Susane Andracki

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Letter from the Editors

Welcome to year four of Ontologica! Things seem to be falling into a well-oiled pattern for us, and we have been both blessed and excited at the quality of diverse submissions we have received since switching away from the solicited submission model we used for the first couple issues. We've also been working at expanding our presence with social media—Susane has taken over the Facebook group, and with the launch of this issue, and going forward, she has several ideas to spark up discussion between issues. We'd definitely like to hear more from our readers in general. What stories/essays/art do you like the most? Where should we take the next issue? Drop us a line either on the Facebook page, or send an email; we'd love to hear from you.

Casplosion

After the caspllosion I was a little bit scared but when I looked up Mrs. Lydia was waving to me from a tree. She was sitting there, and she looked like a brown cat, a fat one, and she had on her purple dress that is my favorite, and she was still holding my lunchbox, but she was up in a tree, so I started to laugh. When I laughed, she laughed, and she came down from the tree backwards, kind of sliding, and I saw her bottom shaking inside her purple dress, because she's a little bit fat, especially her bottom and under her arms where the wobbly stuff is. Mrs. Lydia has a wrinkly neck and she smells good, like powder and crayons. After the caspllosion Mrs. Lydia told me, "Hush, hush, child," but it didn't make sense to say "Hush, hush" because I only laughed once and then I stopped laughing even though she did still look funny, with her hair all swooped up sideways on her head, and her dress wrinkled up, and her bottom shaking when she came down from the tree.

Mrs. Lydia went over to Tommy Rojas where he was lying on the sidewalk except only half of him was lying there, one arm, one side, one leg, his whole head, and the rest was just kind of smooshy and red, which I think was blood. Well, I know it was, but it looked like the kind of hamburger meat that comes in long rolls, all wrapped in plastic, with a picture of hamburger meat on the outside of the package. I knew that it was Tommy Rojas but I didn't want to say hi to him because the way he looked scared me. But when Mrs. Lydia picked him up he was fine and his clothes were only a little bit bloody and he smiled at her and looked up at the sky and said "jellyfish" and then he hugged Mrs. Lydia and then he ran away. There was still the hamburger stuff lying there on the sidewalk where Tommy had been but I didn't look at it. I didn't look at the clouds that were down on the ground instead of up in the sky, and that were swirly brown and yellow instead of grey and white. I didn't listen to the noises, the crashing and the buildings groaning like big animals and I didn't listen to the fire engine sirens

because they were too loud and my ears hurt. Instead I listened to Mrs. Lydia humming.

If you are ever in a casplosion you don't have to be scared, and if you are scared, don't worry because soon you won't be scared anymore. It's only for a minute. At first it's mixed up because you don't know where you are or why everything is kind of flying around and why you started out inside a building, and you ended up outside a building. I didn't like when my chest hurt, like when you run too hard, but it didn't last very long and then there was the part I liked, like electricity, the kind that makes your hair crackle. Except it was all over my body, tingling and crackling, like every tiny part of me was buzzing and crackling and flying apart in different directions. I felt like a flock of birds. One bird flaps up off the ground, then all of them, flapping and flying in all different directions, wings beating and making that whirring sound. It felt like that, except tingly.

If you are in a casplosion don't be afraid that your mom won't hug you anymore, because she will. She will still let you snuggle on her lap while she is also snuggling a pillow. She will put her arms around you and pat you and the pillow, and kiss the top of your head, and she will rock you. She might cry but she will still love you. She might stand up fast and let you tumble onto the ground but she will still love you. You can feel her hands patting your back and her mouth kissing the top of your head, but she can't feel you snuggling her back, and so she cries. Sometimes she can feel you, but she will still cry.

If you are in a casplosion your mom and dad will fight about it. They will pretend not to be mad but they will be mad, at each other, and at you, but they will still love you and when they hug in bed you can crawl in between and feel them and smell them and they won't know you're there. Well, they will know and not know, like when you know actually that Santa isn't real because the presents are all under your Mom's bed, and also you saw lipstick where the bite was taken out of the cookie. So you know he's not real but you think he is real, too, because you can feel it. You can feel

that he is actually up there at the North Pole and that he is actually going to fly down and bring you the presents, and when you wake up in the morning, there they are!

I lie between them. I hug them. When my daddy kisses my mom, I slip inside her mouth and I taste his cigarette taste and his cookie taste, except the cigarette taste doesn't bother me anymore. It just smells like Daddy. If they would let me I would rock with them when they hug, I would crawl inside Mommy, I would crawl inside Daddy, and they could make me into a new baby. I think they could. Sometimes I feel like a new baby, curled inside Mom's stomach, like the picture in the book on the bottom shelf in my bedroom, the picture with the see through baby with veins, still growing inside his mommy, not born yet.

Sometimes Mrs. Lydia takes me to her sister's house and we watch her sister frying apples in a pan at the stove, humming a black person song. All the people at Mrs. Lydia's house are black people and they all like to eat fried apples right out of the pan. Mrs. Lydia's sister smacks at their hands when they snatch apples but you can see she doesn't mind, not really. Sometimes Mrs. Lydia goes with me to my house and she sits at the kitchen table and runs her finger around the rim of Mommy's coffee cup. When Mommy washes dishes, I stand behind her and put my arms around her and lean my head against her soft bottom. Once she felt me hug her and she said, "Lauren, Lauren, are those your little hands?" Mrs. Lydia shook her head and smiled at me in a funny way and then we were back in the tree, her and me, eating snack from my lunchbox.

I am a big girl and a little girl all at the same time. I am bigger than I used to be when I was just turned three instead of three and a half. I am a lot bigger than I used to be when I was two, before I went to preschool. Once my daddy asked me "Are you a big girl or a little girl, Laurie?" and I said "I'm a big girl, but I'm a little big girl," and everybody laughed and Daddy threw me up in the air and caught me in his hands. It hurt my ribs a little – that's those bones in your chest – but I liked it anyway.

I wish that Daddy could snuggle me like Mommy does, but he won't. Sometimes when he pets Cracker I lean against her and put my face in her fur and then he pets me, too, but he doesn't know it. Sometimes he sees me a little bit when he is

hugging Mommy but then he stops. He stops right away and Mommy turns over and cries. Daddy just goes in the bathroom and smokes a cigarette.

I am a big girl but I'm not getting any bigger. I wanted to.

I wanted to.

Witch Hunter



Karl Williams

Waterless Cooking

I'd been married for six months. Nancy had finished school a semester ahead of me and, since January, she'd been teaching music to "special ed" kids. The thought of looking for a job had barely ever crossed my mind. What had been clear to me, four years earlier—what had led me to move from Baltimore to Scranton once high school was through—was that I could no longer remain in my parents' house.

Now, with another graduation over and the summer started, I picked a job at random from the newspaper. And one Monday morning I found myself sitting in the backroom of a store whose Main Street windows were appointed with small round tables and long tablecloths displaying china and crystal place settings. I was listening to a young man in a coat and tie, not much older than myself, who was explaining to me and a few other strugglers through life what it took to sell cookware and dishes to young girls as hope chest items. I had despised this man every second of the five or ten minutes that had passed since I'd first set eyes on him. He had, so far, succeeded in convincing me that his stainless steel cookware was of some quality. But everything else he said, I knew for a fact, was a lie, and that included the words I could hear him saying to himself.

"You must do one thing, if you do nothing else," he told us, holding the smaller frying pan of the set up near his ear. "You have to convince yourselves that this is something that your customers will need. People look for a better way of life. All people. And that is what we are out to give them. So your customers do need this. It's a question of priorities. People have money to spend and we have something that's important to them. It's your job simply to explain to them how important our product is. What we are offering here is revolutionary. Our cookware produces healthier food because, as I've shown you, our waterless cooking method seals all the vitamins and minerals in the food."

He stood behind a table on which he'd just cooked two carrots and a potato in one teaspoon of water using one of the pots and a hot plate. I hated the way he looked. Of course back in the 70s a coat and tie was tantamount to treason, but there was something more. His tailored suit and starched shirt and polished shoes conspired to form a sort of disguise. It was the uniform of people who thought alike, but he wore it because he wished to infiltrate not to join. There was no one he would not use to his own ends.

"Nothing is lost in the cooking," he said. "This is the starting point to our whole program. We believe that our product will improve the lives of our customers. Now I want you to convince yourselves of this fact. You've seen the demonstration and later on today we'll go through it again and then tomorrow we'll have you all start on The Demonstration yourselves. But what I mean to point out here is how essential this fact is to you: the waterless cooking method made possible by our product will substantially improve the lives of our customers."

He paused and put the frying pan down on the table and looked out at us with an expression designed, with some care, to convey an emotion. But the particular emotion he might have had in mind had long ago been lost to him by virtue of the contrivance that he practiced. The young man sitting next to me was writing furiously in the top one of the three notebooks on his knee.

Our mentor continued.

"I want you to do yourselves a favor."

He set out slowly for the right side of the room, looking at the floor as he spoke.

"Now you can take my advice or you can ignore it, but let me tell you this: Seventy-five per cent of you will not be here after two or three weeks. We know this for a fact. Three-quarters of you will be gone and you will have wasted your own time sitting here listening to me talk. I wish I knew who you were now, so that I could save you the trouble. Three-quarters of you are not going to make it . . .

"And the reason you are not going to make it is very simple. Very simple. The reason is this: you will fail to follow the program. It's as simple as that: you will fail to follow the program. So please listen carefully to what I'm going to say to you today and

tomorrow, watch the presentations, take notes if you feel it will help you, follow through on our suggested ways of making your calls, but above all please don't tamper with success. We've done this for years now; we know what works. And that's what I'm here to give you—our program for success."

He had come to rest at the far end of his pacing line and now he peered at us diagonally, bent forward just a bit at the waist. He paused. When he straightened up, the room took a breath. And when he went back to his self-satisfied pacing, the room resumed respiration. I hated the room.

"What you're going to be doing is helping people—there's no other way to look at it. Our product will improve the health of our customers; your task is to make sure they have our product. For this reason you must learn how not to be put off by the people you will see. When they say No to you, it will be as if they had not spoken. Because you have important information for them: you have to get them to hear you out. And once they've heard what you have to say and seen what you have to present to them, it will follow naturally, believe me, that they will want to place an order. How could they not? What you're bringing them is something that is vital to their well-being.

"I want to make this clear—because you have to believe this, you have to get fired up about it; you have to love what you're going to do for them. This cookware is your gift to the people you will meet. You are doing them a favor in calling on them. So be happy. Be confident! Know that what you are doing is worthwhile and valuable."

He stopped and looked out at us with his joyless smile and launched into his next point. Of course it would not only be valuable to the girls we spoke to. If we went at it correctly—that is, with the proper spirit and energy—there would naturally be benefits to ourselves. A young man named Jack Rosen had sold five sets of cookware his first week and had made \$400; he had worked only 20 hours. Kevin Maloney had been with the company for several years and had just been awarded a car for his particular manifestations of devotion. We too could join the success club. He'd held back on these revelations, saving them for the last, as if to prove to us that which was incapable of being proved. For no matter what words his mouth released into the air and no matter

with what finesse he set himself before us as the agent for those words, still the message in his eyes could not be gainsaid:

"I," said the eyes, both left and right.

"I. And only I. And ever and after—only I. And I alone. And I impenetrable. And if, for a time, you, only then in the service of the I, the secret I, the I that must hide but that cannot find barrier enough to hold it from revealing itself. The strong I, the calculating I, the I that sees what it wants and wants all that it sees. The I that wants the universe and that in the end has not even itself."

He had a sort of speech impediment, a peculiar way of voicing one particular consonant, and this was his ace in the hole, a sort of official stamp of the universe: YOU CAN TRUST THIS MAN. You were to pay attention to, to be distracted by this badge while the lies slipped past you. I could imagine his speaking to a prospective buyer and convincing her and the mother—who it was required must also be present at each demonstration—of his genuine concern for her future. He would be the neighborhood boy making good, or the college student working his way through school. He would be the handsome young man that the girl was waiting for—he would throw in the dream gratis, in order to make the sale. Each word that he spoke, each syllable, each breath that he took was a lie plain and simple. He had been lying for so long that he had lost himself in his lies; he was covered in them; you could pick apart each separate lie, but there were so many of them that you would never find him; perhaps he was no longer there.

This was the program he was really talking about—not the list of prospects, and the Seven Points about Waterless Cooking, and the Five Reasons the customer might give not to say Yes, and the Ten Ways to turn the "No" or "Maybe" or "My husband writes the checks" into "Yes" and "Where do I sign?" All these were only the lies about the program he believed he was revealing to us. But the real program—the one I could see so clearly—the real program was the one he was demonstrating to us in his own person. The real program was the program of lies. Lies to the customer, but more important, more basic, more essential were the lies you needed to tell yourself. This was where the program succeeded or failed. The fact that you had a product of some

quality only upped the ante, so to speak. Had you been peddling a piece of crap, the lies would all have been simple. But with this merchandise the chance for success became greater because the whole network of lies could be built on something that would do for rock. And when you left a house all the lies would remain intact behind you. The pot handles would not melt or fall off. No marriage's first meal would be ruined. Armed with this knowledge you could be more studied, stronger—more truthful, as it were, in your lies. The quality of the pots and pans was at the center of the network of lies that extended in both directions to infinity. Here was the brilliance of the plan: you were supremely prepared for anything the customer might have to say, because first and foremost you had lied to yourself and this made your outward lies all the stronger.

The cookware was better because it was newer. The concept of Waterless Cooking was another step into the glorious future. If new was better, then persuading the customer to buy was actually an act of heroism. You were doing your part to move humanity forward. This was a small but very tenacious lie which you simply needed to launch and which then found its way unerringly and attached itself irremovably to the larger lie that in our time infects everyone on the planet. The lie of capitalism. If you were giving something of value, it was natural and good that you too should benefit. After that followed the lie about personal salvation—the money you made would set you free. Then there was the lie about equality: there was no question that you might be taking unfair advantage of your customers; we were all one here, hence it followed that anything was permissible between equals. And the lie about the company: that it would back its product into the dim mists of the future, so that the customer was buying not merchandise so much as a kind of stock in this same glorious future aforementioned. And, not to say finally, but in addition, there was the lie about marriage and family. To be sure this was a part of the other, larger lies, but in a way that made it more serviceable. It was tailor-made and since the people you would be speaking with were sure to be wearing it, you had better try it on for size yourself—with no obligation to buy of course.

Each lie was a world to itself and together they made a universe which grew so large as to merge with the real universe, so that at every point you were confronted not with reality but with one or with a combination of lies about reality. And at the bottom of the structure, underpinning the whole of it, was the lie that was both beginning and end, the largest treachery, but the most subtle, the one that was never voiced because to voice it was unnecessary and dangerous. Unnecessary because this lie did not count for unity, it was unity itself. And dangerous because to voice this lie might have weakened it, might suggest the possibility of its opposite, because to voice it stole the power which lay in its silent pervasiveness. In fact this most basic of lies could hardly be put into words at all. It was almost a bodily function, it had been told and re-told for so long. If one had to force it into words, they might be "I believe," but even this was one step removed, for the final lie one told oneself was more acquiescence than belief. One did not believe—truly believe—anything. Here precisely was the point. And because one did not believe anything, what else was there to do but simply lie down and give in: "Yes," was the final lie. "Yes and always Yes. But only shield me from all of this that is inherent in living. I will say Yes to all of it. Whatever you all have decided. Whatever has been forced upon us. Whatever we have dreamed or hoped for or planned. Only ask me no more. Let me say Yes once and let me know that you will come back to me no more. Yes, Yes, to everything. Yes. And only Yes. And forever Yes. And now please, if you will only let me be . . . "

I hated him and what he said and what he did not say. I hated the room and the building and the city where the building was located. I hated the very tables on which the cookware rested; they were, in such service, an embarrassment to the universe. And I sat there with the others, and I took notes on what he said to us, and then I got in line to pick up my samples and my list of prospects. And the next day, having, I felt, no other choice, I went out and got a map of the city, and I started making phone calls and knocking on doors.

Jose Martinez

Bucaneros



Jan Priddy

Otters, Aristotle, and Thomas Paine

Otters are playful creatures and I have spent hours watching sea otters and river otters chasing one another and leaping and pouncing on one another. At sea, especially in a bay or kelp beds, sea otters will link paws and float, drifting half asleep on their backs. When Americans describe what they regard as the purpose of life, happiness is essential. What they visualize is something close to the life of an otter: eat, sleep, behave affectionately toward family, play, and doze in the sun.

Otters don't rely much on technology for their happiness. They don't build rockets or chat on the internet, but they will use rocks to break open shells in order to eat the clam inside. They will roll over and over in the water as a part of their grooming routine. Seals, too, bask in the sun offshore, one flipper held erect like a sail. They seem, in their behavior, to be getting a kick out of life.

I think most sea mammals must be much happier than Aristotle, who valued happiness, is credited with inventing inductive reasoning and certain forms of logic, and has been highly influential in ethics, philosophy, theology, and biology. Aristotle believed in the supremacy of man and the power of thought based on observation. His writings about science and physics remained influential for many centuries after his death, but he was also wrong about a lot of things. Serious reviews of Aristotle and his work generally include something along the lines of, "While Aristotle was wrong that... nevertheless his theories are essential to the development of western thought..." He believed all things were composed of five elements, including the magical aether. He held the theory that objects and eyes emit light which allow them to be seen and to see. He wrote at length justifying slavery and the proper, limited, place of women. He wrote, as an example of their inferiority, that women had fewer teeth than men. How hard would it have been for him to actually count them? But he didn't value women, and that is the last straw and the main reason I've never had much use for Aristotle. So what that he thought Earth was the center of the universe? People make mistakes. His

misogyny, though—that's personal.

Aristotle studied and wrote on a lot of things—all the sciences, philosophy, and thought itself. He wrote, in fact, about pretty much everything that was known and a lot of ideas that were previously unknown in his time. He's bound to get some things right. He was not stupid, but he failed to follow through on his own reasoning. The teeth thing is a good example. He believed in direct observation, in noting reality and tracking details. Maybe he even looked in the mouths of women and saw fewer teeth. Perhaps he did and found that women consistently had fewer teeth. Adult women. In Athens where they had no rights and few privileges. He wrote that happiness is essential to a successful society and that even women must be happy to achieve that success. His wife Pythias died while he was in his fifties and he had affair with his wife's slave which resulted in his only surviving son, and later he had an affair with a young man. He does not seem to have been very happy in his life. Nevertheless, when he died in his 60s, his will included his wish to be buried next to his wife. Maybe he loved her. I could almost like him for that.

Great thinkers are not often likeable. To enact a change in thinking or in the world they are pushing the envelope, and if they are to become known in the west, they have had to be assertive of their ideas to an unreasonable degree—push push push. Men like Aristotle can be brilliant in their field and hopelessly narrow in other ways. Maybe they seem brilliant for the very reason that they are so blind to the views of others, or even to fairness or justice. How else to buck what *everyone knows* than to be certain—sure. Few revolutionaries who doubt their own agenda get very far. Perhaps humility is righteous, but not a key to success. And even the most egalitarian revolutionaries are rarely consistent in their forward thoughts. Jefferson could imagine the ideal that all men are equal, but couldn't see how this extended to women or to those enslaved. More recently, Ruby Doris Smith Robinson wrote a defense of the role of women in the civil rights movement in 1964, "The Position of Women in SNCC." Noted civil rights activist Stokely Carmichael is said to have responded: "The only position for women in SNCC is prone." I suppose it's not reasonable to expect perfectly revolutionary ideals from even the most forward-thinking revolutionary.

Thomas Paine is an important influence in American Revolution, but I don't think he's studied much anymore in school. In fact, I'm not sure any of the great philosophers of history are studied in the high school where I teach. Thomas Paine came to America through the intervention of Thomas Jefferson. Paine had been in a British prison for arguing in favor of civil rights for Jews. Here he wrote the pamphlet *Common Sense* which earned him the reputation of being the father of the American Revolution. And then he went to France to help push the French Revolution, though he was later disgusted by Napoleon's excesses. Paine was a difficult man, absolutely consistent in his views and in his work for human justice, but determined that everyone pursue the ideal, and irritating his followers through his unrelenting zeal.

It might not be a good idea to pin personal happiness on the ideas of great men (or great women either). I doubt that Pythias was happy with Aristotle. Judging by the four mourners at his funeral, few were happy with Paine at the end of his life. His famous portrait showing a tenderly smiling Paine has never quite struck me as accurate. Nevertheless I have a soft spot for the man, and I wouldn't mind sitting at table and discussing ideas.

I don't feel much kinship with Aristotle. And I don't know any otters personally. But if I had the choice between the cocky Greek and the sea folk and even adding the well-intentioned Paine, I think I'd prefer spending time with otters and seals.

Jose Martinez

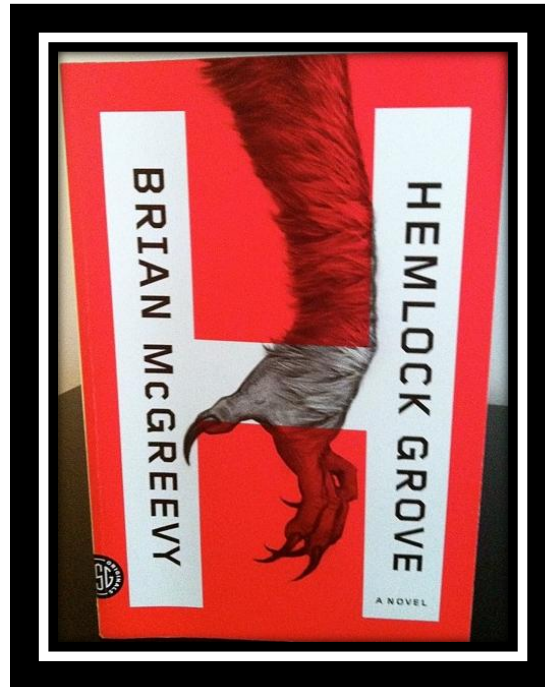
Magic Picnic



Kilean Kennedy

Hemlock Grove

By Brian McGreevy



Narrative pleasures gained from the wildly macabre can arrive in all shapes and flavors, be they on the big screen or a palm-sized pixilated variant thereof, or even, lo and behold, the papery pages of a book. The guilt sometimes attendant these kinds of pleasures, the kind of self-projected worry that's often baseless by default, is of course best left on the trash-heap of corrosive behaviors. Who cares if you enjoy the soothing elocutions of Vincent Price waxing cornpone over the backdrop of some ridiculous horror-movie schlock? Or if you found yourself watching, with interest, a young woman scamper among redwoods in pursuit of a fey lad named Eddie and maybe you stuck with Eddie and his freakishly flared nostrils for a couple more minutes – until you couldn't figure out exactly which character was supposed to have a pulse, suddenly realized for a pleasure to be classified as "guilty" it should probably be enjoyable, and as such turned off the damn TV and picked up a novel. So what's any of this have to do with Brian McGreevy's debut book *Hemlock Grove*?

For starters, there are werewolves and vampires. Right along with an entire world of big-league freakiness that swiftly surpasses most available forms of entertainment even mildly associated with what passes for a scary story these days, be it gothic or supernatural or whatever else sounds profitable to the marketers and retailers. *Hemlock Grove* even has a seven and a half foot tall high schooler named Shelley, replete with an inability to form complete sentences, a somewhat ectomorphic skin condition and a pair of milk-crate sized boots filled with potting soil – just one of many original touches to be found here.

There's a wealthy vampiric family, the Godfreys, which have abandoned their once profitable steel mill, and the economic heart of Hemlock Grove, and have instead repurposed their cashflow into the research coffers of a creepy biotech company haunting the distant hillside. And herein might be one of the most original touches of all: the titular locale of McGreevy's novel is set squarely in the middle of the rust belt:

Rail yards and strip mines and beached coal barges all fallen to some degree of disuse or decay, streaked with tears of rust in contrast to the forests of the region, the trees and the rivers and the hills day by day overtaking the rude, rotted exoskeleton of the Godfrey empire, all dotted with moldering desanctified churches that had gone the way of the working class.

The book's protagonist, Peter Rumancek, presumably the owner of the werewolf claw featured on its cover, lives in a trailer with his pot-smoking gypsy mother and he's also the chief suspect in a pair of grisly murders that open the story. Being somewhat new to Hemlock Grove, and a proud freak, at least relative to most of the student body at his high school, Peter soon draws the attention of Roman Godfrey, more of a young aristocrat than an outcast, though no less otherworldly than Peter, and the two form an odd alliance. Their pairing is one of several affecting friendships that exemplify a surprisingly humanistic current running through what is otherwise a gritty and flat-out wild bit of storytelling.

Plot points and twists and turns are all over the place in *Hemlock Grove* and it takes some page count for everything to come together. Following the appearance of those two mangled bodies, the tale expands to include a cadre of characters and subplots. There are plenty of connections to be made among the murdered, Peter's Romanian ancestry, Shelley's origins, the plight of the Godfrey clan and all of the strange and secret workings inside the walls of the White Tower (this the moniker locals have given to the biotech compound). The identity of the thing responsible for those initial killings, as well as a few more that grow increasingly gruesome and do a nice job of terrifying most of the townsfolk, remains unanswered for most of the book. This might seem like a contrivance to help drive the narrative, but that wouldn't be accurate because this is a book with enough moving parts to keep things hopping from beginning to end.

If this all sounds silly and best experienced amid rays of plentiful sunshine and beach towels, it's not. This is a good read no matter the season. And although the words *werewolf* and *vampire* might indicate a kind of daft exhilaration to be had from reading *Hemlock Grove*, its rewards hew closer to what you might experience from seeing the formation of a promising artistic talent.

Note: McGreevy and director Eli Roth are bringing this to the small screen as an original series for Netflix; there's also a prequel graphic novel available @ www.tor.com.

Medieval Batman Armor



William Pomeroy

Of Demonic Celebration

Good-bye to sleep.
I think this staying up, is exactly what I need.
Take apart your head...
Chew it up and swallow it.
—"Degausser" by Brand New¹

The chilled rush of excitement, the arresting, evocative power of these lines, comes from the demonic. Why does this happen? Why do humans crave the demonic? Why are they drawn toward what seems most at odds with the everyday? How can someone call a famous writer's style "deliciously macabre?"² What gives this phrase its meaning?

Although such questions lead to a single response, their nature and integrity demand that it be thorough. The question of human proclivity toward the demonic has remained, for the most part, *un-answerable*, throughout history.

In a basic sense, the demonic is the luridly unsettling. But more essentially, it is a mood which *embraces* this kind of terror, even to the point of *celebrating* it. —In order to explain why people celebrate the demonic itself, I must examine first the *significance* of what is luridly unsettling in terms of life experience.

In an earlier work,³ I was careful to stress that nothing in life is predictable. One can hardly exaggerate this point. There is perhaps no better description for what life entails than total uncertainty. Therein lies its intrigue and its bitterness—almost in equal measure.

A man is born, and from then on *nothing* seems given so directly. Each moment to the next, he must decide to fight a constant battle, or surrender himself to distraction. But uncertainty is constant indeed. *Life has a way of killing all distraction.* It never hides its volatility for long. —Even Macbeth, who stops at nothing to "make

assurance double sure,"⁴ becomes the greatest victim of its opposite. He barely finishes the words "Tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, creeps in this petty pace from day to day"⁵ before a heavy siege invectively destroys his futile effort at self-preservation.

Nothing in life is predictable, and this includes the manifold of human reaction to events—the former possessing, it seems, a spectrum of possibility just as infinite as that of events themselves. How someone reacts to his experiences, is no more consistent than what *happens* to him, in the first place; and since reactions too are life events, here is volatility again.

Everywhere volatility reveals itself. One need not venture far to watch it strike—and re-duplicate itself upon reaction. The value of Wallace Shawn's work, for example, lies within a kind of nefarious caprice.

Lewis (*Staring at Annette*): Who put you together? How come you're alive? How did I get you? Who gave you to me?

(He leaves the room.)

Annette (*After a little while*): Hey! Come back here!

(He returns.)

Lewis (*Laughing*): Oh! Christ! You've got me! *(He kisses her)* Oh yes oh yes. Am I a good toy? Do you actually like playing with me? *(She doesn't answer)* You know, we're all alone here. I could kill you now, if I wanted to. I could strangle you, or cut your throat, slip up your neck, like a mouse's neck.

(He sleeps. Pause.)

Annette (*To herself*): I'm playing. I can climb the gates. And there are piles of grass and hay, on the other side. I know how to roll in it with my friends. *(Pause.)* Do you like being kissed there?⁶

Often the reactions of specific people to a tangible event are so diametrically opposed that one starts to wonder if the same event could really be affecting them. The passing of a loved one, for example, might plunge one spirit into complete despair; to another it might afford *relief*, that the loved one's suffering has ended. —Or, one might wait until the funeral service concludes, then exclaim within seconds: "Let's go! There's sweet tea and biscuits at the reception!" (Alas, I have witnessed this absurd distraction, to my *undying* chagrin.)

If all of life is volatile—particularly events and reactions thereof—it is *unthinkable* that humans could avoid the luridly unsettling. If one reflects upon himself and what transpires, he will perceive endless difficulty in striving to be consistent. This is the case for everyone. Humans are as likely to experience subliminal joy as infinite pain; to *live* is to *endure* equal propensity for both reactions, and all of those between. "The chords of joy and sorrow lie so close to each other that the latter all too readily resonate once the former are stirred."⁷ —Kierkegaard understood this verity long before his prime, and, alas, so would more people, if they allowed themselves to consider it.

Only against a weariness from distraction does the demonic (ultimately) gain its meaning. What is luridly unsettling carries its own impression thereof, but also hatches a remembrance of personal difficulty for the recipient. This constitutes its full effect. The demonic not only troubles one by itself—additionally it calls to mind experiences of similar pain, and forces one to confront them. Those words of Brand New, for example, hold power in what they bestow through imagery and sound....They also remind their listener of the long nights he has suffered without "the season of all natures, sleep"⁸—to the point at which he felt madly driven to *take apart his head*.

This double effect is undoubtedly why people avoid the demonic, for it contains thereby a pure encapsulation of anguish—a reverberating tremor of the torment life brings.

Initially, these effects may seem a wanton delivery of pain. In terms of how the demonic presents itself, this is quite accurate. Indeed, this overwhelming strike of the unsettling remains a vital component, for it provides the celebratory theme. —One cannot help but think of something that generates so much discomfort, as something

that *embraces* it. The demonic itself seems luridly unsettling, because it nurtures an affinity for suffering; it *celebrates* what people fear.

But for one who wishes not to galvanize himself to life experience, the demonic offers what often seems nowadays a rare opportunity. Humans are again no more likely to feel joy than pain, and this realization of equal capacity is what the demonic, through its encapsulation of anguish and celebration thereof, provides. *It cuts through the armor of distraction and exposes pure volatility.*

The agony of knowing that life will certainly bring pain, though at, strictly speaking, the most *un-certain* time, is what people try and forget by way of distraction. They resultantly need something like the demonic to banish distraction—and show them what it means to live. Only the painful can remind one that pain exists.

Of course, one might cling all the more to distraction once that practice gets threatened. He could swear off forever the luridly unsettling. But then he would commit a terrible crime against himself, for to live without awareness of life's nature, is not really living. One ceases to be fully human when one fails to recognize what being human means.

It is no coincidence that Macbeth's *last* aside contains the following:

I have almost forgot the taste of fears: The time has been
my senses would have cooled to hear a night-shriek, and my
fell of hair would at a dismal treatise rouse and stir as life
were in't. I have supped full with horrors: direness, familiar
to my slaughterous thoughts, cannot once start me.⁹

Immediately after declaring that "horrors" no longer "rouse and stir...as [if] *life* were [present]," Macbeth relinquishes his will to live:

Out, out, brief candle. Life's but a walking shadow, a poor
player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then
is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound
and fury, signifying nothing.¹⁰

There is perhaps no stronger indication that one has ceased to fully experience life, than a lack of fear toward the luridly unsettling. Understanding that such pains are

inevitable does not make them easier to bear. —But at least one does not have to wonder if one is really living.

Joy is not the only reaction that makes one feel alive. There is also mortal pain that feeds upon one's very soul—and yet brings “newer comfort.”¹¹ —One *can* choose to regard the demonic as a means for awareness that one is living as humans were designed. There is no possibility of distraction from *pain*—that being an essential part of life experience—when one suffers under the demonic. People therefore rejoice! From the demonic, each of them gains visceral fulfillment in knowing that he accomplishes something that humans invariably disregard—he lives a *human* life. He never has to “shield” himself. He *embraces* volatility, which is indeed cause for *celebration*. Thus, being aware that (for them) no more vital accomplishment is possible, and with a mixture of tears and laughter, people who live this way might (as their motto) exclaim:

Denounce thy pain,
And incur the worst;
Denounce thy joy,
And deceive thy worth!
There is nothing more to be
Than what thou art, and so remain;
The gifts of sadness, warmth and pain
Receive them all, no more in shame!

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⁷ Kierkegaard, Søren. Kierkegaard's Journals and Notebooks: Volume 1. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2007. 53. Print.

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Albal08



Ordinary Average Guy

Lee slipped out of the car and stretched from the long ride under a sky that looked like rain. Finding a dry spot on the cracked asphalt, he leaned his wrapped package against the back door of the car and worked his hand trying to get some feeling back. He glanced over at Frazier, still behind the wheel listening to the radio.

Damn news. He'd heard enough of those reports over and over again on the trip here to last a lifetime.

He took a step away from the car and looked around. From where he stood he could see the employee parking lot was only half full, but it was still early. And it was a Friday.

"Gonna be a big day today," Frazier said, finally stepping out.

Lee shrugged, said nothing. He watched Frazier move to the front, kick a foot back against the bumper, and light a cigarette.

"Not sure why that asshole is comin' through these parts, ain't no one here gonna vote for him no way."

Lee crossed his arms and smiled, but remained quiet.

"You ain't votin' for him, is you?"

"Nope."

Frazier cocked his mouth to the side and blew off a long stream of smoke.

"So you ain't comin' back with me this evenin'?"

"Nah. Got some things to do."

"I thought maybe you and the miss'us were havin' some problems."

Lee shuffled his feet. "Not that it's any of your business, but, ain't quite like that."

Frazier shook his head, took a final long drag and tossed the cigarette. "Didn't mean to get you all in a huff. Just askin', ya know?"

Lee nodded. "Your mom's real nice for lettin' her stay there. Appreciate that." He paused and looked up at the clouds now starting to part revealing a promising sun.

"Things are starting to happen. Only a little longer and this will all be over."

A faded red Buick pulled up in the space one over from Frazier's Chevy, leaving a trail of blue smoke in its wake. Lee could hear the radio blaring even with the windows closed. Much the same as Frazier, the man, red-faced with a barrel chest, was listening to the news.

More radio. Lee moved around to the front of Frazier's car and leaned against the hood just as the broadcast went quiet and the man pushed open his door.

"Morning there, boys," he called out. The voice was every bit as deep as his chest.

Both Lee and Frazier nodded back.

Frazier slid across the front next to Lee and tapped the face of his watch.

"Looks to me like we have more than 'nuff time to grab a cup of coffee before our shift starts. What'dya say we head in?"

"Okay."

Lee straightened and started to follow Frazier, already headed for the loading dock on the backside of the tired-looking brick building.

"Hey there," called out the older man. "Don't forget your package."

Lee spun around, his face suddenly flush. His eyes shot to the slender package wrapped in newspaper still leaning against the Chevy.

"Thanks, mister," he said as he retrieved it. "Curtain rods for the apartment."

The man stuck out a big calloused hand.

"You must be new here. Don't reckon I've seen you around. I'm Mel Johnson...work on the fifth floor."

Lee shifted the package and met Mel's hand.

"Lee Oswald. I'll be on the sixth."

Archangel Helmet



Travis D. Roberson

Night

It sometimes takes an event like the power going out to be reminded of the night's existence. I speak not of the accustomed blanket of darkness that falls upon us all after each sunset, queuing the start of prime time programming, but rather of the forgotten mysticism shimmering above.

I stood outside on such a night. Silence enveloped my neighborhood after the exasperated yawns of televisions and computers cutting off and the annoyed moans of neighbors through the thin walls, abruptly captured by the shadows of their homes.

I have always been a troubled sleeper, so it was no surprise finding myself in the warm night air at 1:45 in the morning (well past the estimated restoration time the power company gave us). The only unnatural source of light came from a small candle on the porch behind me. It provided hardly any illumination besides the random dull orange flicker against the porch's pavement.

My oldest dog scuffled through the backyard, hardly unnerved by the darkness, sniffing almost every blade of grass moistened from the storm earlier that evening-- the same storm that knocked the power out to begin with.

I tipped my head up, my ears filled with the grating hums of crickets, the obnoxious croaking songs of frogs, and the occasional weary creak of the old wooden fences separating each home. What I found lingering above was something seldom present in suburbia. Stars.

You've always been able to catch a stray one here and there, pulsing in and out against its black backdrop with a strange calm; like the final labored breaths of an old man leaving the world. But on this night the sky was littered. Barely any room was provided for the ashy clouds to fit in amongst these tiny sprites of brilliance peeking through the darkness like Christmas lights punched through cardboard.

I let my eyes wander, briefly studying each and every glimmer until falling upon their lord and master: a moon in full glow. The clouds, little more than shadowy wisps, danced around it like entertainers paid by its satisfaction-- jesters in its court.

I watched with a strange sense of anticipation as one thin, dark cloud coasted along the field of the sky until it streaked across the moon's surface. A serpent obstructing the eye of God. Yet the celestial queen did not seem to mind, or perhaps the disruption was generously ignored, for its brilliance still showered down upon the rooftops and along the fences.

Both my dog and myself bathed in these serene pools of light, accepting each particle that fell on our differing bodies as if it were delivered in strenuous sacrifice.

As more clouds arrived to shield the moon, to beckon her back to her sacred quarters, I discovered the most covert being of the night. Disguised as an extra-bright star was Venus herself, glowing a tarnished yellow, never shimmering, never twinkling, but simply radiating, staring intently at an old relative. And as I locked eyes with her—her true form far from my perceivable vision— I was astounded once more by the constant thought that just beyond this world is an infinite expanse of existence.

I thought of Venus, of her volatile surface, and tried my hardest to imagine each rolling pebble, each pluming volcano and molten stream flowing through her rocky lowlands.

What occurs on the worlds we shall never inhabit? Time is constantly ticking away. School taught me it is a non-renewable resource. It ticks for the universe as well. So what does the universe do with its time?

Standing there that night without power, in the center of my yard, mere slivers of the universe staring down on me, I could not help but think how we often place ourselves at the center of it. We portray ourselves with grand importance. But as you watch each star's heavenly shiver, as you absorb the moon's godly glow and witness the faint traces of other worlds, you realize that you are a small player barely deserving a credit in the supporting cast.

We are another glowing speck beaming down from the sky on another world's view.

These should not be frightening thoughts or realizations, but rather beautiful moments of discovery. We sit suspended on a plane filled with existence and creation we are barely aware of. And no matter how small you may seem or how insignificant

you may feel, it should be accepted as a glorious honor to be one tiny gear in this mammoth machine.

I stood outside well after the flame of the candle had blown out to curls of smoke-- well after the power had been restored, the hum of air conditioning units drowning out the crickets. I looked to the east, over the pointed tips of fence posts. The first glimmer of false light broke upon the horizon just below the glow of the moon and the stars shimmering in postmortem, signifying the day's restored reign.

I thought of all the people around me, tucked away in their beds, some of them rising for work and others pulling away in their cars, and I thought how so few of us ever notice what truly hangs over our heads.

Perhaps we have thrived for so long that too much of this world has become customary. We indulge ourselves on matters that would bring a coy smile to the universe's wizened face.

In a world host to virtual realms such as Facebook and Twitter, we've become a generation accustomed to looking down at the glowing screens balanced in our palms. We've submerged ourselves in obsession with the scripted exploits of celebrity families and the exaggerated embodiments of cliché personae.

We've populated this world with a great number of distractions, holding us back from noticing what truly surrounds us. Faster and faster, we become a people that find it increasingly more difficult to peel ourselves away from the veil of laptop screens and smartphones. We ignore the night, the real world, because we have become afraid of what it can tell us.

The night can be a grim reminder of the possibility we are alone. Glancing up at the stars and the moon, the night has the ability to pose the threat that perhaps this is all an accident, that an almighty creator is absent and we are all just beautiful mistakes. In its unsettling perfection, the night quickly becomes the embodiment of solitude.

And solitude is our greatest fear. We are all terrified to end up alone in one way or another, scared to die; to enter the unknown. The night is an ever-present representation of these fears. Swallowing us in its darkness, it taps us on the shoulder

and lets us know that not only is the unknown right in front of us, but right above us as well.

This is why we hide from the night. We shuffle indoors as it drapes the world, sealing ourselves off from its ominous shadows, retreating to our beds and computers and televisions, anything to bat our thoughts away from the prospect of loneliness.

But these thoughts and feelings are nothing we should run from. Instead of ignoring the night, we should embrace it. It is a humbling experience to watch a small pinprick of the universe coast by you, unaware of your gaze, moving on as if you were never there. The universe may run without us, but we are here, by fluke or purpose, to experience it. There is so much beyond on our reach, so much for us to dream of and so much for us to witness.

The night is hardly a danger, but a sparkling and glowing source of enrichment. This is truly a revolutionary place, but we treat it as a low-rent apartment, waiting for the lease to expire. We are a strange species. Satisfaction has never been obtainable for us. We are always pushing farther, desperately seeking to improve things, to gain and gain, moving so rapidly that we have tricked ourselves into taking our world for granted. We ignore the simplistic beauty of our home as we strive to reach a level of satisfaction that might as well be a fable.

We've forgotten how to stop and cherish the magnificence around us.

Jose Martinez

Pirate



Gary Beck

The Greater Need

Homelessness is a national problem, most apparent in cities with their more accessible resources for basic survival. Two particular categories of homelessness should require priority of services from government and private agencies: Families with children, who are innocent victims; veterans who have served their nation and are owed a debt of gratitude for their service. This selection of target sub-groups is not to dismiss the needs of other homeless, but offers a definition of our triage obligations when not all can be given the services they need. The current economic conditions, with less and less money available from the government and private sector for vital social services, necessitates hard choices in allocating funds to needy populations. We are thus required to prioritize who we help.

The children of homeless families, frequently headed by a single, dysfunctional mother, in my experience working with the homeless for twenty years, are the most vulnerable youth population in America. They lack the basics of stability that allow normal development; secure home, safe and loving environment, healthy diet, belief in self-worth and a positive image of personal identity.

Too often, the homeless children are exposed to drugs, crime, violence, prostitution, and mental, emotional and physical abuse from out of control boy-friends. That our society allows these conditions to go on year after year in a violation of individual rights guaranteed by the Constitution of the United States amounts to crimes against humanity. Whatever the failings of the parents, the children should not be abandoned to a devastating existence in the present and dismal prospects for the future.

It is critical for the agencies and organizations dealing with homelessness to understand that a dysfunctional mother cannot be expected to function normally, merely by providing her with housing and a job. Since our resources are so limited, it is mandatory to implement a triage system that will target the most salvageable: children. The only way to stabilize a dysfunctional single mother with children is to provide

intensive support services that will protect the environment for the children and allow them the developmental opportunity for a better life.

The providers of counseling and social services must recognize that the mother must be sustained in order to protect and preserve the children. The children should be considered the primary clients, with the mother receiving services designed to sustain the children. It is unrealistic and economically wasteful to expect a dysfunctional mother to improve without comprehensive individual services that our system not only cannot afford, but doesn't even believe are necessary. The requirements for acceptable job performance, limited subsidized housing, and paying rent for shelter accommodations, are not viable accomplishments, without extensive support for the mothers.

The current shelter system, supposedly a way station that should lead to permanent housing, does not address the urgent needs of children in their most formative years. These children, while isolated from the surrounding neighborhood due to the placement of shelters that are not rooted in the community, watch television, which accentuates what they lack. Without a nurturing substitute for what appears to be the normal lives of the children they see, but they do not have, traumatic alienation occurs, blighting any hopes of recuperation from the cumulative effects of homelessness. These children desperately need regular personal attention from caring adults, providing substitute parenting, guidance and positive development activities, designed to rebuild self-esteem and stimulate eagerness for the learning process.

The children of homeless families must be considered a potential asset of a struggling society, already diminishing in resources for the well-being of the nation. If the children's vital development is neglected, we will not only lose their future contribution, but they will become a liability, a burden that might have been averted. Perhaps more than any other youth population, these children are at higher risk of failure, due to their direct exposure to the most negative elements of our society that accompany homelessness. These children do not deserve to be discarded without the same opportunity as other children in America. The ability to insure their future is a problem susceptible to solutions by a concerned society.

The problem of dealing with homeless veterans is complicated by the to-date lack of recognition of our debt to them for their service. It is questionable how many of this troubled population can be salvaged and put on the road to functionality. But, they earned our obligation by putting themselves in harm's way, to protect us at home and abroad. It is crucial to remember that these vets were not policy makers deciding national issues that some of us might object to. They did not initiate war or launch attacks without government approval. They served, as police and firefighters serve, to help the public. Perhaps veteran's organizations, or other concerned groups might be induced to form a foundation that would sponsor permanent housing, with appropriate support services for these neglected veterans.

The particular traumas of serving in Iraq and Afghanistan has affected many of our soldiers with intense, personal reactions to the constant threat of danger, and the isolation in any alien culture that offers few comforts to our young men and women, separated from the indigenous population by a wide religious gulf. Many young soldiers are unprepared for the exigencies of war and do not have the inner resources to accept the frightening demands made on their psyches.

When veterans return home, the stress of readapting to civilian life, often prevents the individual from acclimating to what is now a strange environment. Wounded soldiers, treated with painkillers, on coming home may succumb to addiction to illicit substances to relieve their physical and mental suffering. They may have great difficulty in holding a job and maintaining a domestic life. The pressures and demands to lead a 'normal life,' may shatter their remaining stability and lead them to the streets, where insufficient resources facilitates their loss of function.

Despite the supposed best efforts of our government, federal, states and cities, homelessness has become more widespread. The economic downturn and the loss of millions of jobs will further result in an expansion of the homeless population. As a demographic group that does not vote, they are too often neglected by career legislators, primarily concerned with continuing in office. Diminishing resources make it easy for many to ignore the need to develop practical, humane solutions to difficult

problems, contributing to terrible human suffering. We urgently require more creative and constructive solutions to the problems of the most needy homeless population.

Dr. Phil is Not a Pill

Dr. Phil is not a pill. Nosir. He is a voyeur. Voyeurism, as we all know, is like drug addiction. The user—in this case the viewing audience—needs stronger and stronger doses to get his high. You start with husbands cheating on their wives and you end up with daughters sleeping with their fathers. You start with kids stealing from their mothers' purses and you end up with rapists and serial killers. I have noticed this with Dr. Phil, who used to be quite tame, dealing primarily with everyday problems, but seems to be on a downward spiral, turning to the camera every minute or two to assure us that he is only doing this to help people out and not, God forbid, to make millions of dollars. He is quite articulate, despite the sleepy Neanderthal eyes in the big head, and always gives reasonable advice, though he is often predisposed to push guests in a certain direction, as with Octomom, for instance, whom he was determined to get to admit that she was irresponsible in order to get the show on high moral ground, even when it was clear that responsibility wasn't the issue. Dr. Phil of course has a website where he peddles his books and spinoffs like the megabuck TV preachers and other hucksters and like them cannot entirely conceal a certain cynicism beneath the veneer. The cynicism in his case consists in exploiting the grief and misery of real people to put together a good show, not that I doubt for a second that he really wants to help them. Of course, if you're not sitting on a shocker or don't have the right presence, aint no way Dr. Phil is gonna be lending you a helping hand on national TV. Nosir. For that you'll have to go directly to the website and shell out a few bucks for the magical self-help elixirs. The two impulses always mesh in this kind of environment—the desire to help and the desire to make money. You can say that all doctors are like that, medical or otherwise, as are lawyers, accountants, agents, architects, and so on, so what's wrong with it? I suppose that what is wrong with it is determined by how far you are willing to go, how far you are willing to play to your audience's worst impulses, how far you are willing to lower standards of modesty and decorum. Dr. Phil is starting to move toward the bottom. The next stop is Ricki Lake, and after that Jerry Springer.

Or do you just run out of problems after a while and start focusing on headline grabbers? Nowadays Dr. Phil likes to go to the press to get his sensationalized material. Half the work has already been done by the yellow journalists, who have created a monster ripe for the plucking like Octomom or the latest child killer. All Dr. Phil has to do is get them or their families in front of a camera, pull out the index cards where he stores the incriminating evidence and fire away, solemn as a deacon. He pulls this off wonderfully well. That's why he's up there. The audience knows it's in good hands. He never falters. The words of wisdom are always forthcoming. Now a helping hand. Now a smart rap on the knuckles. It's all grist to his mill. Dr. Phil is not a pill.

Dr. Phil represents the worst in television, though many would call it the best. The difference is not very great. The reality and confession shows are an intermediate stage in the evolution of television programming. The dramas simulate violence and other horrors, using actors. The Dr. Phils talk about violence and other horrors, using real people. The next step is obviously to *show* the violence and horrors, using the same real people. Yes, my friends, if you hang in there, you're going to witness actual murders and even rapes in the next ten or twenty years. After all, where do you go from here? Today you only get a rare, fortuitous glimpse of live-action shootouts on the news. There is no Dr. Phil out there to set them up for us. But don't despair. It will start with man beating shit out of woman under the lights of three dozen cameras strategically placed around the house. Audience will gasp. You may get some rough sex too. Sooner or later you will get a rape or murder, tastefully edited at first, and with a great deal of rationalization: so that we can see the danger signs, as Dr. Phil likes to put it. Much discussion on the talk shows, for and against. That will be the beginning. Live sex and violence will have its own Hugh Heffner. You can bet on it.

What we are edging toward is of course the degeneracy of the Roman Empire, that old bread and circuses thing. With so much leisure time on their hands, people don't really know what to do with themselves. Western education has seen to it that people lack the inner resources to engage in meaningful leisure-time activities. The breakdown of family life and the alienation of the young have made satisfaction within the family circle almost nonexistent. Women watch daytime TV, men watch ballgames

and the kids go to the mall or play computer games when they aren't texting one another. Entertainment fills the void. In Rome the rich often footed the bill. In America the public does, though sponsors too kick in their share in return for access to a captive audience. The idea of making a great deal of money out of entertainment is relatively new, historically speaking. The profit motive only serves to inject a lot more cynicism into the mix and the element of competition among producers ensures the public greater and greater extremes in what is served up to them.

Dr. Phil belongs to the pioneer generation of mass market voyeurism. He himself strikes one as a fairly decent individual who can't resist riding the wave, though he is also one of its pacesetters, bringing tastelessness to new heights. This is what you do when you get a daytime TV show with an audience of bored housewives. If you don't deliver you'll find yourself out on the street. That's show biz.

Contributor Notes

AZMAL is a 27 year old Texan who has dedicated his life to crafting. He aims to influence the world with art, especially in an original fantasy theme. Though he doesn't specifically define himself as a leatherworker, it is one of his preferred mediums, offering much versatility—everything from clothing to armor to wall art, upholstery and accessories. He feels like leather brings a level of authenticity and durability not present in many other mediums. Azmal currently has two companies: Prince Armory (www.PrinceArmory.com), featuring his leather armor creations, and Imperial Armories (www.ImperialArmories.com), which has a shop at the Texas Renaissance Festival.

JIM BARTLETT worked for better than 33 years in the telecom industry where he established a reputation for his quirky and animated style in writing what was supposed to be mainly technical documentation. After leaving the poles and networks behind he began to dabble in writing fiction, favoring stories that featured a neck-turning twist. He lives in Santa Barbara, California with his wife and golden retriever, Madison (shhh, she doesn't know she's a dog).

GARY BECK Essays by Gary Beck about foreign affairs, political issues, literary topics and homelessness have appeared in *AIM Magazine*, *Elimae*, *Outcry*, *Purple Dream*, *CC & D Magazine*, *Bergen Street Review*, *Campbell Corners Language Exchange*, *Let Up Magazine*, *The Oracular Tree*, *Bedford-St. Martins Press*, *Penniless Press*, *Fine Lines*, *63 Channels*, *Writing Raw*, *Greensburg Magazine*, *Slurve Magazine*, *Poor Mojo Almanack*, *Wolf Moon Journal*, *Shelf Life*, *The Recusant*, *International Zeitschrift*, *Straitjacket Magazine*, *The Fear of Monkeys*, *Poetic Matrix Press*, *Gently Read* and *Blue Lake Review*. Gary Beck has spent most of his adult life as a theater director. His chapbook 'Remembrance' was published by Origami Condom Press, 'The Conquest of Somalia' was published by Cervená Barva Press, 'The Dance of Hate' was published by Calliope Nerve Media, 'Material Questions' was published by Silkworms Ink, 'Dispossessed' was published by Medulla Press and 'Mutilated Girls' was published by

Heavy Hands Ink. A collection of his poetry 'Days of Destruction' was published by Skive Press. Another collection 'Expectations' was published by Rogue Scholars Press and 'Dawn in Cities' is being published by Wintergoose Press. His novel 'Acts of Defiance' is being published by Trestle Press. His original plays and translations of Moliere, Aristophanes and Sophocles have been produced Off Broadway. His poetry has appeared in hundreds of literary magazines. He currently lives in New York City.

KILEAN KENNEDY was born and raised in the fine state of Kentucky and now lives in Durham, NC with his rowdy wife and kids. His short stories have appeared in such places as *Barrelhouse*, *The Louisville Review*, *The Mississippi Review Online*, *The Wrong Tree Review*, *Word Riot*, and a few others.

JOSE MARTINEZ is from Valencia Spain, and started drawing at a young age. Painting in oil is his favorite medium, but he also enjoys painting murals with spray, because you can cover large areas quickly. When he starts a new work, he approaches it as the new year, and chooses challenging aspects so that he avoids falling into the same patterns.

WILLIAM POMEROY lives in New York City. Other works of his are featured in *Art Times* and *Glide Magazine*. Several others are being submitted. You can reach him at apple.of.kings@gmail.com

JAN PRIDDY has earned an Oregon *Literary Arts Fellowship*, *Arts & Letters* fellowship, Soapstone residency, and Pushcart nomination. She has recently been published in *The MacGuffin*, *CALYX*, *Work Magazine*, *Raven Chronicles*, *Ink Filled Page*, and *North American Review*. An MFA graduate from Pacific University, she lives and teaches on the north Oregon coast.

TRAVIS ROBERSON most recently was the third place recipient in the non-fiction category of the 2011 Porter Fleming Literary Contest. His work has also appeared in *Title Goes Here:* and *The Eunoia Review*. He is a contributor to the science fiction blog

Beyond Metaphors, and spends most of his free time doodling on private property. He lives in his hometown of Winter Garden, Florida.

FRED RUSSELL is the pen name of an American-born writer living in Israel. His recent writing can be read in *Polluto*, *Third Coast*, Static Movement's *Speculative Long Fiction* anthology, and *Fear of Monkeys*.

A.K. SCOTTI is a poet, writer and teacher living in Southern California. Scotti publishes frequently in *Chautauqua*, and was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize by that journal, with work also recently honored by *The Comstock Review*. Scotti holds an MFA from Antioch University. "Casplosion" is an excerpt from her novel in progress, *Ducks Like Me*.

KARL WILLIAMS has published two books with leaders in the self-advocacy movement (the civil rights work of people with intellectual disabilities); his play, based on one of these, recently premiered in San Diego. Williams' songs have aired on NBC, Fox, and on German TV - as well as on radio stations around the world. www.karlwilliams.com